

HEATH TE AU, BACHELOR OF SOCIAL SERVICES

Heath Te Au with Trish Franklin and Phoebe Eden-Mann

This learner profile explores Heath's life, and his experiences within Capable NZ. Heath's early childhood that was marked with fear and mistrust, but also moments of unconditional love. These early childhood experiences would undoubtedly influence many future life decisions. In a home that was immersed in a culture of violence, there was also glimpses of positivity and love; Heath's Grandfather, for instance, was quite a character, and was an extremely positive role model, who taught Heath to question everything, which is a lesson that still resonates today. Although there was much harm done at the hands of Heath's Father, through him, he did give the connection to the people of this land. Heath's Great Uncle George Te Au, was Kaumātua of Murihiku and Te Rauaroaha, he was highly regarded Kāi Tahu rangatira, and it is because of this, that the name Heath shares still holds a lot of his mana.

High school wasn't a pleasant experience, and upon leaving, Heath began a job at the local aluminium and glazing window firm. As a young 15 year old, Heath had to adapt to hard work, and living in the working man's world. 5 o'clock meant tools down, glasses up. For the first time, Heath felt accepted and part of a group. Before long, Rodgermomics took its toll, and the firm was closed. The team Heath was part of got moved to the Clyde Dam site, which is where a life altering event would take place. Heath was involved in an accident with a concrete cutter. This near fatal incident was to be the catalyst for many decisions later in life. Heath's first experience with the opiate drug, Morphine was a result of this accident. Soon after this, Heath left his job, realising that although they were being paid good money, it was due to the highly dangerous nature of the work. Work that Heath no longer felt comfortable doing.

Heath soon moved to Invercargill with his first real love interest. It was here that he began playing music with people that he had met through her. He was a natural on drums, and this led to joining a band, and then a better band, and then a reasonably professional touring band. This lifestyle suited Heath, the travel, the excitement, and especially the drug taking rock 'n' roll culture. The stage life empowered Heath, he wasn't hiding in the shadows. In a relatively short period of time, Heath's relationship ended, and he became involved with a group that ended up with a needle in his arm; Heath's past experience with Morphine had come back to haunt him. During the early 90's, he was part of the resident band at Sammy's night club in Dunedin, was involved with many local musicians, and was a part of various studio recordings, and performing projects. The world of the original music that was the 'Dunedin Sound' was quickly adapted to, and Heath was soon heavily immersed; there was a darker drug scene that was lurking in the shadows, one that was as attractive to Heath as the music. Soon he was in recording studios, touring, travelling, and making records; Heath was living his dream.

Due to increasing drug use, productivity was slow from about 1997-onwards. Contact with very concerned friends decreased, as a full on opiate habit took control. To fund this habit, Heath began to see off his vast collection of musical instruments. Many of these instruments were his touring, gigging, and recording companions, and were sold in exchange for whatever drugs were available. Concern from family and friends was only growing.

Before long, rehab came in the form of a court order, and three days before graduation, the Police arrested Heath for outstanding drug related possession charges. The courts were not as lenient this time, and after a three month stay in Dunedin Prison, he was sentenced to a six month rehab in the Bay of Plenty. Final day of rehab was April 1st, 2000 (an irony that is not lost on Heath). After arriving back in Dunedin, Heath's first priority was getting his name

down for Methadone; he wasn't quite ready to stop, but didn't want to continue appearing in front of a judge. It was during this time that it became apparent that Heath's band, Cloudboy, had returned to Germany to pursue their dreams; in Heath's own words, "It wasn't them being demanding. It wasn't people expecting too much, no one was in my face. It was me. They had left to follow their dream because I had left them long before. When I think about what my addiction has cost me, at the top of the list is the trust I took from my friends. For this I am truly sorry and words like this do it no justice at all".

Whilst on methadone, Heath completed treatment for the Hepatitis C Virus. It was unsurprising that Heath had contracted Hep C from the intravenous drug scene. Following successful treatment, Heath was offered a support role at the local needle exchange to help other people going through Hep C treatment. This role was a turning point for Heath, and was the main motivator in the decision to come off methadone. "Getting rid of Hep C gave me a reason to live, helping other IV addicts find this empowerment gave me a reason to fight". Christmas, 2008, was when Heath stopped methadone, and he is now nine years sober. Those three months of withdrawal were brutal, and Heath earned every moment of his sobriety. By throwing himself into his role as a Hep C advocate and educator, Heath began to slowly feel more human again. Funding was secured from the Ministry of Health for the Hepatitis C Resource Centre, and he even had an employee!

It was around this time that Heath received news that he was to be a Father; and on July 20th, 2010, Lulu, was born. Life would never be the same, it wasn't just about Heath "It was all about her".

Part of Heath's role at the Hep C Resource Centre was going out to the Otago Corrections Facility, and talking to the inmates about blood borne viruses, and blood safety. In 2012, he was offered a position at the Drug Treatment Unit, as a programme facilitator and addictions counsellor. During this time, Heath was also studying towards a degree in social services. Heath has been at the Drug Treatment Centre since 2012, and loves working with clients, considering it to be a true privilege. This year, Heath aims to achieve his goal in obtaining his qualification. He has surprised himself in what he has achieved in life with study and working commitments.

Heath sees himself as a work in progress and is proud of himself for not falling into old patterns from years gone by:

I used to run. I'm now standing still. Learning to accept the benefits of remaining grounded, and to accept the things I cannot change".

Heath's experience with Capable NZ is best said by him "My first interaction at Capable NZ was with Trish Franklin, who as it turned out would walk me through the entire process until my graduation. Trish was an absolute treasure. We had regular meetings that were relaxed and constructive. This was probably the most helpful time during my entire study path. Constructive reflections and feedback on material I had previously sent and an objective view of ideas to help meld it all into a single body of work. I'd spent a few years studying upstairs by this point, but the concept of having everything in my portfolio blend into each other I did not truly understand until I met Trish. I cannot express enough the positive result this has had on how I now approach programme and parole report writing.

For me this was the true measure of my time with Capable NZ: A higher professional standard that in all actuality I probably now take for granted.

With the completion of my degree through Capable NZ, a postgraduate study path in Health Sciences at the University of Otago presented itself. And that ability to write flowing and succinct reports served me well, especially within the high-stress moment of a 400 level written exam.

Would I recommend Capable NZ? Absolutely. I have and I do. In my opinion Capable NZ is the professional standard in applied qualifications."

Heath Te Au BSS(dist.), PGCertHSc(ADCO)